

FOUR

The Weather

Weather: The condition of the atmosphere (at a given place and time) with respect to heat or cold, quantity of sunshine, presence or absence of rain, hail, snow, thunder, fog, etc., violence or gentleness of the winds. Also, the condition of the atmosphere regarded as subject to vicissitudes. *fig.* and in figurative context; *spec. (lit.)*, applied to an intellectual climate, state of mind, etc. *Naut.* Of a ship, to make good, bad, etc. weather of it: to behave well or ill in a storm. Weather is described by variable conditions such as temperature, humidity, wind velocity, precipitation, and barometric pressure.

—OED Online

In all kinds of weather, the ships came and went from Saint Louis, Bristol, Rhode Island, New York, from Senegambia and offshore Atlantic, from West Central Africa and St. Helena, from Southeast Africa and Indian Ocean islands, from the Bight of Benin, from the Bight of Biafra, from Liverpool and Lisbon, from Bahia, Havana, Marseilles, Amsterdam, Port Antonio, Kingston, Rio de Janeiro, and London. The ships set out one in the wake of another. Five hundred years of voyages of theft, pillage, and bondage. Some of the ships made only one trip; others made multiple trips under the same and different names, under the same and different owners, and under the same and different flags, under the same and different insurers. The ships kept going and coming, over thirty-five thousand recorded voyages. I find their names in the TransAtlantic Slave Trade Voyages Database: *Antelope*,

Formiga, The Good Jesus, Diligente, Black Joke, Bonfirm, Mercúrio, The Phillis, Alligator, Voador, Tibério, The Amistad, Africa, Africain, Africaine, African Gally, Africano Constitucional, Africano Oriental, African Queen, Legítimo Africano, Vigilante Africano, Agreeable, Agreement, Aleluia da Ressurreição e Almas, the names went on and on.¹

There were rebellions on board many of those slave ships. Other ships were intercepted or claimed at sea or in port by one jurisdiction or another. One such ship was the *Antelope*, about which it was recorded that the “original goal” — delivering the 259 surviving abducted Africans on board, 64 percent of whom were children, to the port where they would be sold — was “thwarted”; “reason human agency.”² From Morrison’s *Beloved* I draw a connection between Sethe’s mother and her shipmates who made that Middle Passage crossing and that ship the *Antelope*. The figure of the *Antelope* first appears in *Beloved* through the dance that, from a distance, Sethe sees her mother and her mother’s shipmates dance. As the figure appears here, I read it as it stands in for the Middle Passage and more, for other suspensions of Black being between life and death and resistance to those violent suspensions. The antelope as African cosmology and slave ship haunts the novel and repeats in the description of the fetus that Sethe is carrying as she breaks for something like freedom across the Ohio River away from the Kentucky plantation called Sweet Home. After Schoolteacher attempts to make that (left side human; right side animal) ledger flesh, Sethe breaks for supposedly free soil, carrying with her memories of another flight for freedom. “She waited for the little antelope to protest, and why she thought of an antelope Sethe could not imagine since she had never seen one. She guessed it must have been an invention held on to from before Sweet Home, when she was very young. Of that place where she was born (Carolina maybe? or was it Louisiana?) she remembered only song and dance” (Morrison 1987, 30). The text continues, “Oh but when they sang. And oh but when they danced and sometimes they danced the antelope. The men as well as the ma’ams, one of whom was certainly her own. They shifted shapes and became something other. Some unchained, demanding other whose feet knew her pulse better than she did. Just like this one in her stomach” (Morrison 1987, 31). The *Antelope* and those other ships and what occurred before them, on them, and in their wake repeat in Morrison’s text and they are Weather. They haunt

as Sethe gives birth to Denver in a “wrecked and wretched boat” on which she hopes to cross the Ohio River.

In *Beloved*, the weather comes, breaks, changes quickly; it “let[s] loss,” it is remarked upon and forgotten; it is. In my text, the weather is the totality of our environments; the weather is the total climate; and that climate is antiblack. And while the air of freedom might linger around the ship, it does not reach into the hold, or attend the bodies in the hold. Recall Margaret Garner, on whom Morrison’s Sethe is based. Margaret Garner, who first breathes Ohio’s “air of freedom” when she is seven years old³ and who, twelve years later, on the evening of January 27, 1856, escapes from Kentucky and heads back to Ohio. She has with her her four children, her husband Robert, and his parents, Mary and Simon. Of course, six years after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act that “free air” of a “free state” is denied to those in the hold who would take their freedom; slavery is enforced as the law of the entire United States. Its atmospheric density increased; slavery undeniably became the total environment.

By and by all trace is gone, and what is forgotten is not only the footprints but the water too and what is down there. The rest is weather. . . . Just weather. (Morrison 1987, 275)

Remember that Margaret Garner is recaptured, and in her attempt to deny ownership to those who would claim her and her children as property, she succeeds in killing her daughter Mary. After which she is recaptured, held, tried, and put on the *Henry Lewis*, that ship that will return her slavery, this time to New Orleans, a place from which almost no enslaved people managed to escape. Margaret Garner marked for that ship, stowed on it with her husband and her baby daughter, Cilla.

As the *Henry Lewis* set out on its trip to Gaines’ Landing in Arkansas, it collided with the boat the *Edward Howard*. Margaret and Cilla Garner were thrown or jumped overboard. Twenty-five people died in that accident, and the Garners’ infant daughter Cilla was among them. Cilla was the nursing daughter whom Garner had tried unsuccessfully to kill in order to prevent her re-abduction into slavery. When *The Liberator* and the *Cincinnati Daily Commercial* covered this, they did not report on the weather, or on the speed of the boats or on the traffic on the sometimes-crowded river. The papers reported that there was a col-

lision and that it caused Cilla's death. The papers reported "Margaret Garner's expression of joy" on learning that the journey by ship had succeeded in killing Cilla where she had not. Another one of her children would be spared the hell of slavery (Reinhardt 2010). The papers reported that "a black man, the cook on the Lewis, sprang into the river and saved Margaret whom it was said displayed frantic joy when told that her child was drowned, and said she would never reach alive Gaines' Landing in Arkansas, the point to which she was shipped — thus indicating her intention to drown herself. . . . Another report is, that, as soon as she had an opportunity, she threw her child into the river and jumped after it. . . . It is only certain that she was in the river with her child and that it was drowned" (Reinhardt 2010, 134). The only certainties are the river, that weather (antiblackness as total climate), and that Cilla, "it" as the newspapers mis/name her, was drowned. (That oceanic ungendering repeats.)

In the wake, the river, the weather, and the drowning are death, disaster, and possibility. They are some of the impossible possibilities faced by those Black people who appear in the door and dwell in the wake. Here is Edwidge Danticat (1996b) on this: "The past is full of examples when our foremothers and forefathers showed such deep trust in the sea that they would jump off slave ships and let the waves embrace them. They too believed that the sea was the beginning and the end of all things, the road to freedom and their entrance to Guinin."

It is some of these impossible possibilities that, in *Beloved*, Sethe wants to keep from her daughter Denver. She wants to keep Denver from standing in the place where it was and is and will be; she wants to keep her from being overtaken by the past that is not past. Sethe wants to protect Denver from memory and from more than memory, from the experience, made material, of people and places that now circulate, like weather. What Sethe describes is the afterlife of slavery, and it is a "thought picture" that is out there "waiting for you." As Sethe tells Denver, memories reanimate the places and spaces of slavery post nominative emancipation. Rememory is Sethe's word for it, and it is out there, waiting for you: "What I remember," she says, "is a picture floating around out there outside my head" (Morrison 1987, 36). What Sethe remembers, rememories, and encounters in the now is the weather of being in the wake. It is weather, and even if the country, every country, any country, tries to forget and even if "every tree and grass blade of

[the place] dies,” it is the atmosphere: slave law transformed into lynch law, into Jim and Jane Crow, and other administrative logics that remember the brutal conditions of enslavement after the event of slavery has supposedly come to an end (Morrison 1987, 36).

In the United States, slavery is imagined as a singular event even as it changed over time and even as its duration expands into supposed emancipation and beyond. But slavery was not singular; it was, rather, a singularity—a weather event or phenomenon likely to occur around a particular time, or date, or set of circumstances. Emancipation did not make free Black life free; it continues to hold us in that singularity. The brutality was not singular; it was the singularity of antiblackness.

Singularity: a point or region of infinite mass density at which space and time are infinitely distorted by gravitational forces and which is held to be the final state of matter falling into a black hole.
(Merriam-Webster Online)

In what I am calling the weather, antiblackness is pervasive as climate. The weather necessitates changeability and improvisation; it is the atmospheric condition of time and place; it produces new ecologies. *Ecology: the branch of biology that deals with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings; the political movement that seeks to protect the environment, especially from pollution.* We read in *Beloved* one ecology of the ship that continues into the present: “In the beginning the women are away from the men and the men are away from the women storms rock us and mix the men into the women and the women into the men” (Morrison 1987, 211). The weather trans*forms Black being. But the shipped, the held, and those in the wake also produce out of the weather their own ecologies. When the only certainty is the weather that produces a pervasive climate of antiblackness, what must we know in order to move through these environments in which the push is always toward Black death?

An example of knowledge to survive such lived and produced ecologies comes to us via Dionne Brand’s “Ruttier for the Marooned in the Diaspora.” “The oral ruttier,” she writes, “is a long poem containing navigational instructions which sailors learned by heart and recited from memory.” The “Ruttier” (historical and present) “contained the

routes and tides, the stars and maybe the taste and flavour of the waters, the coolness, the saltiness; all for finding one's way at sea" (Brand 2001, 212). Coming at the end of *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand's "Ruttier" has taken note of the weather, and this poem appears as a way-making tool, a gift of knowledge that, and how, Black life is lived in the wake. The inhabitants of Diaspora are

marooned, tenantless, deserted. Desolation castaway, abandoned in the world. They was, is, wandered, wanders as spirits who dead cut, banished, seclude, refuse, shut the door, derelict, relinquished, apart. More words she has left them. Cast behind. . . . All unavailable to themselves, open to the world, cut in air. . . . And it doesn't matter where in the world, this spirit is no citizen, no national, no one who is christened, no sex, this spirit is washed of all its lading, bag and baggage, jhaji bundle, georgie bindle, lock stock, knapsack, and barrel, and only holds its own weight which is nothing, which is memoryless and tough with remembrances, heavy with lightness, aching with grins. (Brand 2001, 213)

A long poem for those of us in the wake of those ships, Brand's "Ruttier" does not contain conventional navigational instructions to country and safe landing (could it? those of us in the wake cannot use such conventional means); it does contain what present/future migrants might meet, refuse, and remake on and in their journeys. The "Ruttier" takes as ground that first plunge into unbelonging, re-frames as gift that absence of country. I read the "Ruttier," then, as a way-making tool and a refusal of nation, country, citizenship; it is a barometer, a reading of and a response to those atmospheric pressures and the predictably unpredictable changes in climates that, nonetheless, remain antiblack.

The boats set out in all kinds of weather from Zliten and Tripoli and other points along the coast of Libya. These boats have no names, though they might come to be called *Left-to-Die*. Those Africans from other countries who had been living and working in Libya set out, now, because of the war, the ongoing destruction of Libya, and all that has occurred since. The atmosphere radically changed, specifically in relation to "Black Africans," and so they boarded those "wrecked and wretched boats."

“The Libyans who got me to Italy are not human,” he said. “They speak with the gun not with words. . . . They pushed eight Nigerians into the sea.” . . . And they pushed my friend into the sea. They all drowned.⁴

Teenagers arriving in the Italian port of Lampedusa told workers from Save the Children how migrants from sub-Saharan African countries were often kept below the deck, deprived of water and sunlight. . . . The weather was really bad. Some people were afraid. They didn’t want to go, but there was no way back. (Dearden 2015)

The boats set out one after another.

And when the migrants reach the shore they are often returned to the hold in the form of the camp, the *Lager*, the detention center, and so on, and they may be returned to the ship. Cast behind, set adrift, once again.

Aspiration

We were the offspring of lovers
convicts the poor and had been
brought to this forest by the Factory Committee
from we born
or. in some cases. from infancy. Many of us were mad
some were idiots and a few suffered from enyhstamines hys
-terias vitamin deficiencies & allergies that behave like liars
tubers & blood pressure/diseases . result of the vicious in
-ternal breeding of our impenitential ancestors.
—Kamau Brathwaite, *The Black Angel/DS (2): Dream Stories*

We revolt simply because . . . we can no longer breathe.

—Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*

Again, when NourbeSe Philip asks in the Notanda to *Zong!* “What is the word for bringing bodies back from water? From a ‘liquid grave’?” (Philip 2008, 202), the word she arrives at is *exaqua*. And so we ask yet again: What would it mean to stay safe and to defend the dead—our “impenitential ancestors”; those who are actually dead and those whom the state refuses to grant life; those whom the state persists in choking the life out of? I’ve been thinking a lot about aspiration. Not in the conventional sense. Or at least not in the sense that may most readily come

to mind in which aspiration is tied to *opportunity*—that connection to the door of no return and the ship and the shipping is never far away—and tied to class movement. Tied as well, in the United States to some articulation of that deadly *occlusion* that is continually reanimated and called the American Dream. (This American Dream stands counterpoised to the dream of and in Brathwaite's *Dream Stories* and "Dream Haiti." To dream Haiti is an entirely different enterprise all together. It is to enter and inhabit the dream and reality of revolution.) I've been thinking about what it takes, in the midst of the singularity, the virulent antiblackness everywhere and always remotivated, to keep breath in the Black body. What ruttier, internalized, is necessary now to do what I am calling wake work as aspiration, that keeping breath in the Black body? I've been thinking aspiration in the complementary senses of the word: the withdrawal of fluid from the body *and* the taking in of foreign matter (usually fluid) into the lungs with the respiratory current, *and* as *audible breath* that accompanies or comprises a speech sound. Aspiration here, doubles, trebles in the same way that with the addition of an exclamation point, Philip transforms and breaks *Zong* from a proper name into *Zong!* That exclamation point breaks the word into song/moan/chant/shout/breath.

It is to the breath that I want to turn now. To the necessity of breath, to breathing space, to the breathtaking spaces in the wake in which we live; and to the ways we respond, "with wonder and admiration, you are still alive, like hydrogen, like oxygen" (Brand 2015). As Philip says, the pause in the poem, the breath, "is totally subversive in the face of the kind of broad-brush brutalizing where people just get reduced to Negro man, Negro woman, and ditto, ditto, ditto. You pay attention to one, and it is such an amazing act—and one that spills over to all the other dittoes—paying attention and taking care with just the one. Because that's all we can do is care one by one by one. And that's why it was so important for me to name these lost souls in the footnotes to the early poems" (Saunders 2008a, 78). Breathlessness and the archive: the archives of breathlessness. The details accumulate in *Zong!* and for us, what might it mean to attend to these archives? What might we discover in them?

In 1982, Los Angeles police chief Daryl Gates "provoked an outcry from civil rights advocates when he said that blacks might be more likely to die from choke holds because their arteries do not open as fast as arteries do on 'normal people.'" ⁵ Nine years later, but only seven

being seems lodged between cargo and being. *Wake: in the line of recoil of (a gun). Wake: the track left on the water's surface by a ship. Wake: the watching of relatives and friends beside the body of the dead person.*

It was soon after Eric Garner's murder on July 17, 2014, that the jury in the trial of Ted Wafer returned a verdict of guilty in the case of his murder of nineteen-year-old Renisha McBride.⁹ The previous July had seen the all-(non Black) woman jury return a verdict of not guilty for George Zimmerman, the murderer of seventeen-year-old Trayvon Martin.¹⁰ The verdict in the Wafer trial brought, perhaps, a little breathing room before the next onslaught, the next intake of air, the held breath. In the weather of the wake, one cannot trust, support, or condone the state's application of something they call justice, but one can only hold one's breath for so long. "*We revolt simply because, for a variety of reasons, we can no longer breathe*" (Fanon [1970] 1994, 50).

Day after day the stories arrive. Fifty people suffocated in the hold of a ship;¹¹ three people suffocated in prison over the course of a weekend in the United States. To explicate Fanon, it is not the specifics of any one event or set of events that are endlessly repeatable and repeated, but the totality of the environments in which we struggle; the machines in which we live; what I am calling the weather.

In an interview in the *Atlantic* about *Breathing Race into the Machine*, her book on racial science and the invention and use of the spirometer, the instrument that measures lung capacity, Lundy Braun says,

In 1864, the year before the Civil War ended, a massive study was launched to quantify the bodies of Union soldiers. One key finding in what would become a 613-page report was that soldiers classified as "White" had a higher lung capacity than those labeled "Full Blacks" or "Mulattoes." The study relied on the spirometer—a medical instrument that measures lung capacity. This device was previously used by plantation physicians to show that black slaves had weaker lungs than white citizens. The Civil War study seemed to validate this view. As early as Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in which he remarked on the dysfunction of the "pulmonary apparatus" of blacks, lungs were used as a marker of difference, a sign that black bodies were fit for the field and little else. (Forced labor was seen as a way to "vitalize the blood" of flawed black physiology. By this logic, slavery is what kept black bodies alive.) (Braun and Shaban 2014)

Daryl Gates and contemporary policing practices are the inheritors of the history of the spirometer that produced Black bodies as defective and monstrous.

There is, too, a connection between the lungs and the weather: the supposedly transformative properties of breathing free air — that which throws off the mantle of slavery — and the transformative properties of being “free” to breathe fresh air. These discourses run through freedom narratives habitually. But who has access to freedom? Who can breathe free? Those narratives do not ameliorate this lack; this lack is the atmosphere of antiblackness. Recall, too, that captive Africans were brought out of the hold, weather permitting, to put fresh air in their lungs and to be exercised. (Of course, this was about their value as cargo and not about the health of the captive Africans for themselves. This is being, property, for the other.) Weather monitoring was a major part of plantation management. Awareness of the ecological systems was necessary for the growth and cultivation of certain crops (growing seasons, yield, etc.) and for the life expectancy (or lack of) of the captive laboring population. We read, “Planters consistently recorded the weather in their work logs as part of the revolution in plantation accounting techniques” (Roberts 2013, 195). Weather determined local practices of working enslaved people, and those practices differed from plantation to plantation and from region to region. Some slave owners believed in working enslaved people harder in the rain, while under the same conditions other slave owners assigned the enslaved “lighter” tasks. Overall, though, enslaved people had very little respite from work even when plantation managers believed that work in the rain produced a miasma or “bad air.” One Jamaican planter reports “not a single day of work lost to weather over the course of two years” (Roberts 2013, 196). Regardless of the particular practices, relentless hard labor in the rain, in the sun, in damp and in dry, cutting cane, laying dung, hoeing, and weeding, all had deleterious and often deadly effects on the lungs and bodies of the enslaved.

Slavery, then, simultaneously exhausted the lungs and bodies of the enslaved even as it was imagined and operationalized as that which kept breath in and vitalized the Black body. We, now, are living in the wake of such pseudoscience, living the time when our labor is no longer necessary but our flesh, our bodies, are still the stuff out of which “democracy” is produced. Back to Fanon ([1970]1994, 50), who wrote

in *Toward the African Revolution*, “There is not occupation of territory, on the one hand, and independence of persons on the other. It is the country as a whole, its history, its daily pulsation that are contested, disfigured . . . under these conditions; the individual’s breathing is an observed breathing. It is a combat breathing.”

What is the word for keeping and putting breath back in the body? What is the word for how we must approach the archives of slavery (to “tell the story that cannot be told”) and the histories and presents of violent extraction *in* slavery *and* incarceration; the calamities and catastrophes that sometimes answer to the names of occupation, colonialism, imperialism, tourism, militarism, or humanitarian aid and intervention? What are the words and forms for the ways we must continue to think and imagine laterally, across a series of relations in the hold, in multiple Black everydays of the wake? The word that I arrived at for such imagining and for keeping and putting breath back in the Black body in hostile weather is *aspiration* (and aspiration is violent and life-saving). Two additional forms of wake work as a praxis for imagining, arrive in the registers of Black annotation and Black redaction.

Black Annotation, Black Redaction

Annotate: To add notes to, furnish with notes (a literary work or author).

An annotation is metadata (e.g. a comment, explanation, presentational markup) attached to text, image, or other data. Often annotations refer to a specific part of the original data.

—OED Online

Redaction: a: The action of bringing or putting into a definite form; (now) *spec.* the working or drafting of source material into a distinct, esp. written, form. *Usu.* with *into*, (occas.) *to*.

b: The action or process of revising or editing text, esp. in preparation for publication; (also) an act of editorial revision.

Obs. The action of driving back; resistance, reaction.

—OED Online

I point to these practices of Black annotation and Black redaction as more examples of wake work. The orthographies of the wake require new modes of writing, new modes of making-sensible. Redaction comes to us most familiarly through those blacked-out “sensitive



4.1 Steve McQueen, *End Credits*, 2012. Sequence of digitally scanned files, sound, continuous projection. Installation at the Art Institute, Chicago, 2013. Courtesy of the artist; Marian Goodman Gallery and Thomas Dane Gallery, London

lines” in certain government documents that contain information we are not allowed to read. Steve McQueen’s film *End Credits* (2012) consists of six hours of images and voiceover of the redacted FBI files of Paul Robeson. As I watched and listened, it again became clear to me that so much of Black intramural life and social and political work is redacted, made invisible to the present and future, subtended by plantation logics, detached optics, and brutal architectures.

There is, in the Black diaspora (and I include the Continent here because of colonial histories and presents and trans*migration) a long history of Black life, of Black lives being annotated and redacted. There is, as well, continuous resistance to and disruption of those violent annotations and redactions. A 2015 conference on Black portraiture has the subtitle *Imaging the Body and Re-Staging Histories*. Each time I read that word *imaging* I read it doubly. That is, I read the word as *imaging*, “to make a representation of the external form of,” and also as *imagining*, “to form a mental image or concept of; to suppose or assume; the ability to form mental images of things that either are not physi-

cally present or have never been conceived or created by others.”¹² If we understand portraiture to be both the “art of creating portraits” (image and text) and “graphic and detailed description,” how might we understand a variety of forms of contemporary Black public image-making in and as refusals to accede to the optics, the disciplines, and the deathly demands of the antiblack worlds in which we live, work, and struggle to make visible (to ourselves, if not to others) all kinds of Black pasts, presents, and possible futures? Much of the work of Black imaging and the work that those images do out in the world has been about such imaginings of the fullness of Black life. In *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture*, Richard Powell (2008, xv) writes that “a significant segment of black portraiture stands apart from the rest of the genre, and not only because of the historical and social realities of racism. Rather, the difference often lies in the artistic contract between the portrayer and portrayed; conscious or unconscious negotiations that invest black subjects with social capital.” While Powell speaks here of Black artists and subjects’ negotiated and reciprocal imaginings, I want to think about those portraits outside of our own imaging and imagining in which, to borrow from Huey Copeland (2013), we seem “bound to appear.” There is a long history and present of resistance to, disruption and refashioning of images of blackness and Black people. There is a long history and present of imaging and imagining blackness and Black selves otherwise, in excess of the containment of the long and brutal history of the violent annotations of Black being: what Spillers, for example, called the hieroglyphics of the flesh; a history that is “the crisis of referentiality, the fictions of personhood, and the gap or incommensurability between the proper name and the form of existence that it signifies” (Hartman 2014). I am thinking here, ushering here, into the gap, Black annotation together with Black redaction, not as opposites, but as trans*verse *and* coextensive ways to imagine otherwise.

Put another way, I want to think annotation in relation to the dysgraphia and the orthography of the wake; in relation to those photographs of Black people in distress that appear so regularly in our lives, whether the image of that suffering Black person comes from quotidian or extraordinary disasters, the photos of them often hit in the register of abandonment. The photographs do this even, or even especially, when they purport to “humanize” Black people—that is, they purport

to make *manifest* “humanity” that we already know to be present.¹³ To be clear, just as I am not interested in rescuing the term *girl* (see “The Ship”), I am not interested in rescuing Black being(s) for the category of the “Human,” misunderstood as “Man,” or for the languages of development. Both of those languages and the material conditions that they re/produce continue to produce our fast and slow deaths. I am interested in ways of seeing and imagining responses to the terror visited on Black life and the ways we inhabit it, are inhabited by it, and refuse it. I am interested in the ways we live in and despite that terror. By considering that relationship between imaging and imagining in the registers of Black annotation and Black redaction, I want to think about what these images call forth. And I want to think through what they call on us to do, think, feel in the wake of slavery—which is to say, in an ongoing present of subjection and resistance.

Annotation appears like that asterisk, which is itself an annotation mark, that marks the trans*formation into ontological blackness. As photographs of Black people circulate as portraits in a variety of publics, they are often accompanied by some sort of note or other metadata, whether that notation is in the photograph itself or as a response to a dehumanizing photograph, in order that the image might travel with supplemental information that marks injury and, then, more than injury. We know that, as far as images of Black people are concerned, in their circulation they often don’t, in fact, do the imaging work that we expect of them. There are too many examples of this to name: from the videotaped beating of Rodney King in 1991, to the murder of Oscar Grant, to the brutal murders of twenty-one trans women in the United States as of November 2015, to all of the circulating images of and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, to the ongoing deaths in transatlantic, trans-Mediterranean, and trans-continental crossings extending across the Black global diaspora. This is true even though and when we find images of Black suffering in various publics framed in and as calls to action or calls to feel with and for. Most often these images function as a hail to the non Black person in the Althusserian sense. That is, these images work to confirm the status, location, and already held opinions within dominant ideology about those exhibitions of spectacular Black bodies whose meanings then remain unchanged. We have been reminded by Hartman and many others that the repetition of the visual, discursive, state, and other quo-

tidian and extraordinary cruel and unusual violences enacted on Black people does not lead to a cessation of violence, nor does it, across or within communities, lead primarily to sympathy or something like empathy. Such repetitions often work to solidify and make continuous the colonial project of violence. With that knowledge in mind, what kinds of ethical viewing and reading practices must we employ, *now*, in the face of these onslaughts? What might practices of Black annotation and Black redaction offer?

What follows are three examples of what I am calling Black visual/textual annotation and redaction. Redaction and annotation toward seeing and reading otherwise; toward reading and seeing something in excess of what is caught in the frame; toward seeing something beyond a visibility that is, as Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) argues, subtended by the logics of the administered plantation. In “Home,” Toni Morrison (1998, 7) writes that she has consistently tried “to carve away the accretions of deceit, blindness, ignorance, paralysis, and sheer malevolence embedded in raced language so that other kinds of perception were not only available but were inevitable.” I am imagining that the work of Black annotation and Black redaction is to enact the movement to that inevitable—a counter to abandonment, another effort to try to look, to try to really see.¹⁴

I return, again, to the photograph of the little girl with the word *Ship* affixed to her forehead (figure 2.5). This little girl was at the beginning of this work, and she occupies its center. Shortly after that catastrophic earthquake hit Haiti on January 12, 2010, I entered the archive of photographs that had emerged from it. It wasn’t the first time I had cautiously entered this archive, but on this occasion I was stopped by that photograph of a young Black girl, ten years old at most. A third of the image is blurry. But on the right-hand side one can still make out grass and dirt, something black that she is lying on, and, in the background, other things (a figure? a bundle of clothing? a cigarette? something else?).

The girl’s face is clear; it’s what’s in focus. She is alive. Her eyes are open. She is lying on what looks like a black stretcher; her head is on a cold pack, and you can make out that there is writing on that cold pack and some of the words, like *instructions for use and disposal*. You can also read the words *roll up* and *dispose* and *registered trademark*. There’s some debris on the stretcher. There are two uncovered wounds over the girl’s right eye and another smaller one under it. A piece of paper

is stuck to her bottom lip. She is wearing what seems to be a print cotton hospital gown. She is looking straight ahead of her, or directly at, or past, the photographer's camera. She looks to be in shock. Her big black eyes, with their lush eyelashes, look glazed. Her look reaches out to me. Affixed to her forehead is that piece of transparent tape with the word *Ship* written on it. What is the look in her eyes? What do I do with it? The first annotation was that word *Ship*. What can one see beyond that word that threatens to block out everything else?

When I stumbled upon that image of this girl child with the word *Ship* taped to her forehead, it was the look in her eyes that stopped me. Then with its coming into focus that word *Ship* threatened to obliterate everything and anything else I could see. What was it doing there, I wondered? But I returned again and again to that photo and to her face to ask myself about the look in her eyes. What was I being called to by and with her look at me and mine at her? Over the course of the years since I first found that image of this girl, I returned to it repeatedly to try to account for what I saw or thought I might see. Where is she looking? Who and what is she looking at or looking for? Who can look back? Does she know that there is a piece of tape on her forehead? Does she know what that piece of tape says? She must be afraid. Does she know that she is already linked to a ship and that she is destined for yet another one? Her eyes look back at me, like Delia's eyes, like Drana's.¹⁵

In a move that is counter to the way photographic redaction usually works—where the eyes are covered and the rest of the face remains visible—here I include only Delia's and Drana's eyes. I performed my own redaction of Agassiz's ethnographic images in order to focus in on their eyes. I redact the images to focus their individual and collective looks out and past the white people who claimed power over them and the instrument by which they are being further subjected in ways they could never have imagined or anticipated. I want to see *their* looks out and past and across time. Delia and Drana. In my look at them, I register in their eyes an "I" and a "we" that is and are holding something in, holding on, and held, still. Delia and Drana sitting there (still) and then standing there (still), and clothed and unclothed (still) and protected only by eyelashes (still).¹⁶ I am reminded here, of the anagrammatical life of the word *still* for the enslaved and for all Black people in slavery's wake. Over the course of a paragraph in *Beloved* Morrison elaborates what *still* means for the heavily pregnant Sethe, who at this point in her



4.2 Joseph T. Zealy, Delia, country born of African parents, daughter, Renty. Congo. Delia's eyes. Detail. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, PM# 35-5-1/053040 (digital file# 60742034 DETAIL)



4.3 Joseph T. Zealy, Drana, country born, daughter of Jack, Guinea, plantation of B. F. Taylor Esq. Drana's eyes. Detail. Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, PM #35-5-1/053041 (digital file# 60742035 DETAIL)

pregnancy “was walking on two feet meant for standing still . . . still, near a kettle; still at the churn; still, at the tub and ironing board” (Morrison 1987, 29–30). I am reminded here of *still* as it repeats in Brand’s *Verso* 55 (2015), marked as it is there, with wonder at our survival and the residence time of the wake: “We felt pity for them, and affection and love; they felt happy for us, we were still alive. Yes, we are still alive we said. And we had returned to thank them. You are still alive, they said. Yes we are still alive. They looked at us like violet; like violet teas they drank us. We said here we are. They said, you are still alive. We said, yes, yes we are still alive.” Delia and Drana, marked, still, because of the daguerreotype’s long exposure time, which required that one hold still for long periods of time, and because they were of the ship yet not immediately off the ship like their fathers identified as Renty (Congo) and Jack (Guinea). The little girl who survives the 2010 Haitian earthquake is also a descendant of the ship and she is marked still, and once again, for its hold. I looked again at that photo and I marked her youth, the diagonal scar that cuts across the bridge of her nose and into her eyebrow, those extravagant eyelashes that curl back to the lid, the uncovered wounds, that bit of paper on her lip, and a leaf on the gown and in her hair. “*standing here in eyelashes, in/. . ./the brittle gnawed life we live,/I am held, and held.*”

I marked the violence of the quake that deposited that little girl there, injured, in this archive, and the violence in the name of care of the placement of that taped word on her forehead, and then I kept looking because that could not be all there was to see or say. *I had to take care.* (A different kind of care and a different optic than the ones employed in the wake of the *Zorgue*, that ship called Care.) I was looking for more than the violence of the slave ship, the migrant and refugee ship, the container ship, and the medical ship. I saw that leaf in her hair, and with it I performed my own annotation that might open this image out into a life, however precarious, that was always there.¹⁷ *That leaf is stuck in her still neat braids.* And I think: *Somebody braided her hair before that earthquake hit.*

The Little Girl Who Wrote “Hi”

She comes to us from the front pages of the *New York Times*, a December 10, 2014, article titled “Schools’ Discipline for Girls Differs by Race and Hue” and with the caption “Mikia Hutchings, 12, whose writing on

a wall at school led to a juvenile criminal case, and her lawyer, Michael J. Tafelski, waiting for a meeting held last month by a Georgia state committee studying school discipline.”¹⁸ Writing is discovered on a school gym bathroom wall. Two middle school students are accused of vandalism: Mikia Hutchings, who is Black, and her (unnamed in the article) white girlfriend. When Mikia’s family is alerted to the charges against her, they find it hard to believe she was involved in defacing school and personal property. Then they report to the authorities that they cannot afford to pay the hundred-dollar “restitution” fee to the school and to the student whose sneakers were damaged. “While both students were suspended from school for a few days, Mikia had to face a school disciplinary hearing and, a few weeks later, a visit by a uniformed officer from the local Sheriff’s Department, who served her grandmother with papers accusing Mikia of a trespassing misdemeanor and, potentially, a felony” (Vega 2014). Because her family is unable to pay the money, Mikia will be made to pay a much larger price. “As part of an agreement with the state to have the charges dismissed in juvenile court, Mikia admitted to the allegations of criminal trespassing. Mikia, who is African-American, spent her summer on probation, under a 7 p.m. curfew, and had to complete 16 hours of community service in addition to writing an apology letter to a student whose sneakers were defaced in the incident. *Her friend, who is white, was let go after her parents paid restitution*” (Vega 2014).

The article is sympathetic to Mikia. It tries to bring her into focus, and yet she disappears in description. The introductory paragraph reads: “To hear Mikia Hutchings speak, one must lean in close, as her voice barely rises above a whisper. In report cards, her teachers describe her as ‘very focused,’ someone who follows the rules and stays on task. So it was a surprise for her grandmother when Mikia, 12, and a friend got into trouble for writing graffiti on the walls of a gym bathroom at Dutchtown Middle School in Henry County last year” (Vega 2014).

See and hear Mikia Hutchings. She is a child, a young Black girl, just twelve years old and slight. In the photograph she appears, captured, her lower back resting against a wall as she leans forward, beside a classroom door. She is wearing a gray-and-black horizontal-striped shirt, black stretch pants, black boots with white turned-over cuffs, and a light blue insulated jacket with a hood and a white collar, trim, and



4.4 Mikia Hutchings, twelve, and her lawyer, Michael Tafelski, wait for a disciplinary hearing at the Henry County Board of Education building in McDonough, Georgia, November 18, 2014. Hutchings and a white friend faced very different disciplinary actions for the same minor incident of vandalism, part of what some see as bias in a state where black girls are five times more likely to be suspended from school than white ones. © Kevin Liles/The New York Times/Redux

white cuffs that echo the white cuffs on the boots. She looks down and to the side, and the fingers of her left hand hold one finger of her right hand. (She holds herself, holds onto herself.) What is the look on her face? As she appears here, she is physically overwhelmed by her white male legal representative, by the charges against her and all of the authority that has been summoned and is determined to discipline her. This authority, the police, the courts, the school, and so on, would put her in cuffs; they have been summoned to transform this girl into a felon. As it abuts the modifier Black, “girl” here, again, appears as the anagrammatical. “‘When a darker-skinned African-American female acts up, there’s a certain concern about their boyish aggressiveness,’ Dr. Hannon said, ‘that they don’t know their place as a female, as a woman’” (Vega 2014). Mikia Hutchings is held, and in that holding once again “girl” is thrown into question.

If we annotate and redact that first paragraph of the *New York Times* article, we might find Mikia’s point of view. Through redaction we

might hear what she has to say in her own defense in the midst of the ways she is made to appear only to be made to disappear. Put another way, with our own Black annotations and Black redactions, we might locate a counter to the force of the state (care as force; “the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something”) that has landed her on the front page of the *New York Times*. With this analytic we might begin to see and hear Mikia, whose sole offense was writing the word “Hi” on the wall while a young, Black girl child without financial resources.



That I am arguing for Mikia to come into sight should not be mistaken as an argument for representation or representational politics.

Rather, Black annotation and Black redaction are ways to make Black life visible, if only momentarily, through the optic of the door. Black annotation and redaction meet the Black anagrammatical and the failure of words and concepts to hold in and on Black flesh. Think, now, of the annotations and redactions of the second autopsies ordered by the families of the murdered and commissioned in the wake of so many murders. The second autopsy performed on Michael Brown was requested by his family and their legal team in order to show injury. In other words, that second autopsy was ordered to show the harm done to Michael Brown, who was shot at least six times, including two times in the head. As with Lamont Adams, the bullet wounds to Michael Brown's hand suggested that he was in the posture of surrender. By securing that second autopsy, his family tried to disrupt the dysgraphia that wrote a version of events that was riven with antiblackness. It was not enough to see Michael Brown's body uncovered in the street for

hours on a hot August day, his mother and stepfather prevented from going to his side. It was not enough to see his mother's distress, to see and hear her scream and fall into the arms of family members. It was not enough to see his distraught stepfather on the side of the road with a makeshift sign declaring: "The police just murdered my son." Not enough. And so his family added their own annotations; they tried to come up with his body's harms as seen through their eyes in order to contest that body that was drawn by antiblackness (figure 4.5). And, of course, even then, it is not enough. It cannot be enough. They cannot recuperate his body. The constant production of Black death *is* and *as* necessary returns us to the singularity. But just as the weather is always ripe for Black death, the singularity also produces Black resistances and refusals.

Black redaction and Black annotation are ways of imagining otherwise. I turn here to Julie Dash's *Daughters of the Dust* (1992). *Daughters* was produced over the course of ten years, and it emanated from the politics and aesthetics that began with Dash's work as part of the LA Rebellion, along with other filmmakers, like Charles Burnett and Haile Gerima. When it was released in 1992, *Daughters* became the first film by an African American woman to get cinematic distribution in the United States. It found an immediate audience with Black women, and at the same time it came to be seen by many other viewing audiences as a foreign film because it did not deal in the familiar.

It was Dash and cinematographer Arthur Jafa's aim to unmake colonial optics that occupy and reproduce the retinal detachment that, then, reproduces the hold as location and destination. That that is their aim is clear from the first shot of the film, which takes place on a boat. In that opening scene we are introduced to Viola Peazant; Mr. Snead, the photographer she has hired to document the migration of her family; her long-gone cousin Yellow Mary; and Yellow Mary's lover Trula. Mr. Snead shows Yellow Mary and Trula the kaleidoscope he has brought with him. He explains the word's etymology as "*Kalos* . . . Beautiful. *Eidos* . . . Form. *Skopein* . . . [to see]" (Dash 1992, 82). As he speaks, Yellow Mary looks at Trula through the kaleidoscope, and Viola explains to Mr. Snead that the slave trade, the importation of "fresh Africans," continued "back off these islands" for many years after it was banned (Dash 1992, 84). This scene establishes for the audience its entrance into a complex visual scene as it interrogates established knowledges:

CASE NO. _____ NAME MICHAEL BROWN

Entry, reentry and exit perforations,
preliminary autopsy report

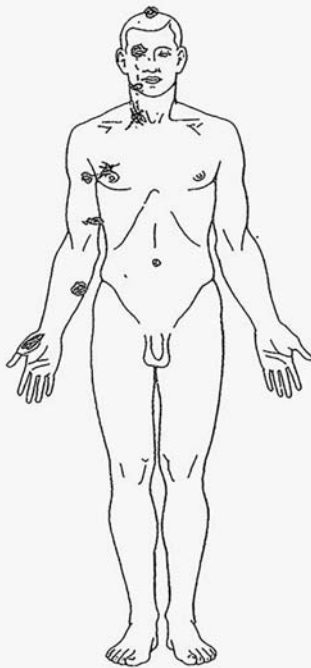


DIAGRAM A

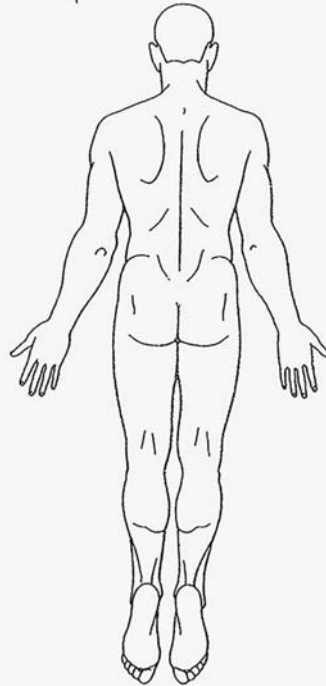


Figure 25 (17)

Michael M. Baden
M. Baden
08/17/2014

4.5 Preliminary autopsy report delineating wounds on Michael Brown's body.
Courtesy of Dr. Michael M. Baden

the time when slavery ended, what the archives don't record. The photographer with his optical equipment, the conversations they have on the boat, and the deliberate way the characters look at and away from each other prepare the audience for something formally beautiful and something that challenges their assumed viewing habits. The slowing down of some of the shots from twenty-four to sixteen frames per second is also a reconfiguration of ways of seeing, and in those instances when the film slows down, an additional space is created for the audience to enter into the scene. Dash (1992, 16, 25) says that she "was told over and over again that there was no market for the film. The distributors talked about the spectacular look of the film and the images and story being so different and thought-provoking, yet the consistent response was that there was 'no market' for this type of film."

With those additional spaces and with her visual and aesthetic choices for marking slavery's long time, Dash engages in some of her own Black redactions. By which I mean, her redaction is her decision to show the traces of slavery as the indigo blue that remains on the hands of the formerly enslaved people who labored and died over the poisonous indigo pits on the Sea Islands off of the coast of South Carolina. Though Dash was well aware that the indigo stains would no longer be visible forty years after the end of legal chattel slavery, she chose this image as the trace of slavery rather than whip-scarred backs, brands, or other more familiar marks that are all too visible in, for example, Steve McQueen's *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013). For Dash, the indigo is what endures as trace, and this trace positions viewers differently in relation to the fact that the afterlives of slavery are long and that the life span of the enslaved people who labored over the pits was very short. "From fifty to sixty hands work in the indigo factory; and such is the effect of the indigo upon the lungs of the laborers, that they never live over seven years. Every one that runs away, and is caught, is put in the indigo fields, which are hedged all around, so that they cannot escape again."¹⁹

Twelve Years a Slave is a film that McQueen has said "is about love" and that his work here, "is about keeping the tension." He continues, "I love the idea of just being in real time, being present, being there. I'm a filmmaker, so I always think: 'When is the breaking point? When is long enough?'"²⁰ If we think *Daughters* alongside *Twelve Years*, we might ask where and when is the breaking point in the latter film, or for that matter in most contemporary films in the West, in their rep-

resentations of Black suffering (of the wake, the hold, the weather, the ship). Where is the breaking point, the breath, the pause, where the circulation, production, and reception of images of Black suffering and, importantly, the pleasure in them are concerned? The long time/ the long shot, the residence time of Black life always on the verge of and in death, goes on. As it appears in *Twelve Years a Slave* (whether in the vicious extended beating of Patsey or in the four-minute-long take of Northrup's hanging), it enters the everyday as continuous and gratuitous. Not so in *Daughters of the Dust* and its visualization of Black life in the decades after slavery's end, as one family is about to migrate from the South to the North of the United States.

Not so in Mauritanian filmmaker Abderrahmane Sissako's gorgeous film *Timbuktu* (2014), which tells a story of life lived in the immanence and imminence of death and in the midst of great violent change. *Timbuktu* makes tangible the ways life is lived in the wake and under the pressure of tremendous change. In Sissako's film the year is 2012 and the pressure is Ansar Dine's takeover of Timbuktu, Mali. They banned music; they made women cover their faces, heads, and hands; they forbade play; and they introduced strict Islamic law. Sissako visualizes life in the midst of those impositions that drastically change the lives of the people in Timbuktu. There is a group of young boys who—in the moments that they are not being watched by the men and boys with guns, some of those boys not much older than themselves—play a full and beautifully imagined and executed football match without a football because football has been banned. There is a young woman who has been caught and found guilty of the crime of making music together in a room with three friends, another woman and two men. She is sentenced to forty lashes. In the midst of this vicious public beating her weeping breaks into song. (From *Zong* [which again means “song”] to Philip's *Zong*!) This is, again, the time of the oral ruttier, and those songs help us find our way; they are our internalized maps in the long time of our displacement. “*We sing for death, we sing for birth. That's what we do. We sing.*”

There is another woman who appears several times in Sissako's *Timbuktu*. Each time she appears in the film she is moving unmolested through the town and she is wearing a fantastic dress made of brightly colored strips of cloth that trail into a long indigo train. This woman refuses to cover her head or hands or face; she holds up traffic, she

strolls past the men and boys with guns, she refuses to cower before them; she laughs at their commands, these men who have descended on and taken over Timbuktu, the enforcers of Islamic law who smoke in secret and have long conversations with each other about music and professional football. Of the women in the city she is not alone in her refusal; every woman in *Timbuktu* resists, but this woman alone faces no reprisal.

There is a stunning moment in the film when this fantastically dressed woman appears on screen and speaks. We learn that her name is Zabou, and when she speaks Haiti erupts into Sissako's *Timbuktu*. Zabou speaks and her words return us to Brathwaite's *Dream Haiti* and its collapse of time and space.²¹ Her words return us to the dream and promise and centrality of Haiti in diaspora imaginings.

What Zabou says is this: "It was on the twelfth of January 2010 and 4:53 p.m. exactly, the same time as Miami. At 4:53 p.m., Port-au-Prince time, the earth quaked and I found myself here, at exactly 9:53 p.m." Zabou asks one of the men, drawn to Timbuktu from all over the continent, for confirmation of this. But the man replies that she was in Timbuktu long before that earthquake hit. To which Zabou retorts: "What is time?" She continues: "Time doesn't matter. The earthquake is my body, the cracks, it's me! Cracked open from head to toe and vice versa, my arms, my back and my face, cracked. What is time? I am cracked. Sweetpea, you and I are alike. We're both cracked. Cracked everywhere" (figures 4.6–4.8).

Time. In *Beloved*, time "never worked the way Sixo thought." In *Beloved*, Sethe has trouble believing in it because "some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay" (Morrison 1987, 21, 35). Time appears here as cracked. Time is cracked like Zabou's body, like Zabou's life, and not only her life. She tells the young man with a gun (who appears to have been a dancer in his former life) that he, too, is cracked. Zabou doesn't believe in time, at least not linear time. She lives in trans*Atlantic time, in an oceanic time that does not pass, a time in which the past and present verge. "Time doesn't matter," Zabou says again, and I hear in her speaking the *longue durée*, the residence time, of the wake.

Zabou moves through Sissako's film, trailing that long indigo train, blue like the sea, a V like a wave; like a wake; it is a crack that follows her, a crack that precedes her. Sissako has opened a seam in Timbuktu and inserted Haiti; Sissako has opened a seam in Timbuktu, and from



4.6–4.8 Film stills. *Timbuktu*. © 2014 Les films du Worso — Dune Vision — Arches Films — ARTE France Cinéma — Orange Studio.
With the courtesy of LE PACTE

it Haiti has emerged. Zabou's blue train, like the indigo on the hands of the formerly enslaved in *Daughters of the Dust*, like the violet teas and the violet chemistry of Brand's *Verso* 55, like water, like the ruptures of the transatlantic and trans-Arab slave trades, appears and opens the film into and out of all of the violences and more, as so many aftershocks, as so many wakes. The work that *Daughters* and *Timbuktu* perform is wake work.

And in Zabou's speech I hear a connection to what Beverly Bell describes in *Fault Lines: Views across Haiti's Divide* in the aftermath of the earthquake. Writing about the work that began in Haiti as soon as the first tremors stopped, and of the poor who had to continue to live in the midst of ongoing destruction, Bell (2013, 3) says: "They knew that their country's devastation—before the earthquake as now—was not inevitable." The work that I am theorizing as wake work took place in Haiti in the midst of searching for the injured, mourning the dead and dying, and sitting with those who hovered on the brink between material life and death. This was work that Haitian people knew would have to be done, and in carrying it out they drew on the "alternative principles and practices that the grassroots have tried to establish over time" (Bell 2013, 4). There is a before and an after to the earthquake: but there is no before the ongoing event of the disaster.²² How, after all, to split time?

I hear in Zabou's outrage an echo of the outrage in novelist Fatou Diome's interview. I repeat, here, the words from Diome that began this section: "These people whose bodies are washing up on these shores,—and I carefully choose my words—if they were Whites, the whole Earth should be shaking now."²³ I hear an echo of Danticat (1996b) capturing the insistence with which Haitian women speak themselves into the present. Their greeting: "How are we today, Sister? /I am ugly, but I am here."

Coda

Aspiration. *Aspiration* is the word that I arrived at for keeping and putting breath in the Black body.

Living as I have argued we do in the wake of slavery, in spaces where we were never meant to survive, or have been punished for surviving and for daring to claim or make spaces of something like freedom, we

yet reimagine and transform spaces for and practices of an ethics of care (as in repair, maintenance, attention), an ethics of seeing, and of *being* in the wake as consciousness; as a way of remembering and observance that started with the door of no return, continued in the hold of the ship and on the shore. As one survivor of the contemporary ship and the hold says, “We couldn’t put him in the middle of the boat because the boat was damaged and we were taking on water. If we left him like this, he’d be gone, whoosh. So, we were really careful with him. I like things like this—when people care. It’s all we have.”²⁴ This is an account counter to the violence of abstraction, an account of surviving the ship when the wake, the ship, the hold, and the weather and their un/survival repeat and repeat. An account of *care* as shared risk between and among the Black trans*asterisked.

Dionne Brand offers us such accounts of care in all of her work. She moves in *A Map to the Door of No Return* from “A Circumstantial Account of a State of Things” to another kind of circumstantial account in her “Ruttier” for survival in the diaspora and in *Verso* 55. In Brand’s work that door of no return marked the real and metaphorical site that “accounts for the ways we observe and are observed as people. It exists as the ground we walk. Every gesture our body makes somehow gestures toward this door” (Brand 2001, 26). In Brand’s elaboration the door exists alongside and counter to the archive; it exists juxtapositionally as an account of the “thing in fact which we do not know about, a place we do not know. Yet it exists as the ground we walk.” In the first instance, Brand (2001, 5) maps how we have come to live in the places we are and that “tear in the world” that is also “a rupture in history, a rupture in the quality of being.” Brand maps a desire to say more than what is allowed by an archive that turns Black bodies into fungible flesh and deposits them there, betrayed. Brand began *Map* with that rupture, and she closes it with a song; the “Ruttier for the Marooned in the Diaspora” is her offering to guide us to how to live in the wake. The “Ruttier” is a guide to indiscipline and lawlessness; a map of disinheritance and inhabitation; a guide to how, traveling light, one might just live free of, “refuse, shut the door on,” the weight of responsibility for one’s planned demise. Simply, Brand’s “Ruttier” insists us, Black people, into all of our largeness against that dysgraphia that would insist on the smallness of Black being in the wake. To do this, Brand plumbs the archives of the everyday that come from collecting, from thinking juxta-

positionally, from “sitting in the room with history.” “*They owe, own nothing. . . . They wander as if they have no century, as if they can bound time, as if they can sit in a café in Brugge just as soon as smoke grass in Tucson, Arizona, and chew coca in the high Andes for coldness*” (Brand 2001, 213–214).

Living with immi/a/nent death, in the shadow of that door, in the wake of slavery, with the obstructed passages of the Mediterranean, with carding, stop and frisk, the afterlives of *partus sequitur ventrem*, respiratory distress, detention centers, *Lagers*, prisons, and a multitude of other forms of surveillance, “I want to do more than recount the violence that deposited these traces in the archive” (Hartman 2008, 2). So, I turn again to the photo of the beautiful girl with the word *Ship* on her forehead and to two images by Roy DeCarava that seem to speak to and anticipate it.

The images come from the photo text *The Sound I Saw*. The first photograph is of a little Black boy, approximately five years old. The shot is close cropped, and it is his face that we see; it is his face that is in focus. His face occupies the majority of the frame. He looks to be wearing a hospital gown; the material seems to be gauze, it is white, and it has a V-neck. He is lying on a white or light-colored sheet. He has a small mark over his right eyebrow. He looks concerned; his brow is slightly furrowed. His look, like the look of the girl, reaches out to me across time and space. His big brown eyes look out at something, at someone, at and to us.

In *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, I wanted to make present the someone that those eyes look out to. I wanted to stay in the wake to sound an ordinary note of care. I name it an ordinary note because it takes as weather the contemporary conditions of Black life and death. Another one of the textual scenes that exemplify this note of care of which I speak, this ordinary sounding of care in excess of the places where we are, arrives through the character of Hi Man in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. Hi Man is the “lead chain” of the gang of men in the prison chain gang to which Paul D is sold in Alfred, Georgia, after he is captured during his escape from Sweet Home:

“Hiiii!” . . . It was the first sound, other than “Yes, sir” a blackman was allowed to speak each morning, and the lead chain gave it everything he had. “Hiiii!” It was never clear to Paul D how he knew when

to shout that Mercy. They called him Hi Man and Paul D thought at first the guards told him when to give that signal that let the prisoners rise up off their knees and dance two-step to the music of hand-forged iron. Later he doubted it. He believed to this day that the “Hiiii!” at dawn and the “Hoooo!” when evening came were the responsibility Hi Man assumed because he alone knew what was enough, what was too much, and when things were over, when the time had come. (Morrisson 1987, 108)

Hi Man sounds and holds the note that keeps the men with whom he is chained from the brink. And when the deluge comes, the rain that almost kills them, locked underground in the mud and silt, in that cage called the slave ship on land—that note provides the means through which Paul D and the forty-five other men escape that prison ship in Alfred, Georgia.

The second DeCarava photograph is of a Black woman and that same little boy. She is facing away from the camera, and her face is turned toward the boy. She holds a thermometer in her right hand. In this photo the little boy is sitting up in the bed, cross-legged, in front of her. He is drinking water from a glass; she is watching him. His white top now seems to be a pajama top that matches the bottoms we now see that he has on. The photo’s caption tells us that the woman is his mother. It doesn’t look like they are in a hospital room. It looks like he is at home. There is a chest of drawers against the wall, and there are belongings on top of it. There is a grate in front of the window. I imagine the little girl with *Ship* taped to her forehead alongside this little boy from half a century before. The photographs are similar in subject; the little boy and the little girl bear a striking resemblance; she is a sick girl, he is a sick boy, they are both awaiting care. But Roy DeCarava took the photographs of the little boy and the little boy with the woman who is his mother: DeCarava, the famous Black photographer of Black life who refused the documentary, who refused to let his images of Black people be used to frame someone else’s *not* seeing, to abet our thingification. So DeCarava’s photographs are also strikingly different. And it is through the care and the light and shadow of DeCarava’s look that this woman who is the little boy’s mother appears, here, in a scene that strikes an ordinary note of care.

I return to Brand’s “Ruttier for the Marooned in the Diaspora” as

a song of direction that contains mercy, a song that contains all of the things that we are. Her “Ruttier” writes and contains Black being as it has developed in the wake; Black being that continually exceeds all of the violence directed at Black life; Black being that exceeds that force. For Brand, all of this is knowledge and wealth. And she offers us a song, a map to anywhere, to everywhere, in all of the places in which we find ourselves. The Ruttier: a map to be held; to behold.

So we are here in the weather, here in the singularity. Here there is disaster and possibility. And while “*we are constituted through and by continued vulnerability to this overwhelming force, we are not only known to ourselves and to each other by that force.*”

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